1   WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

2   1.   A method for referring patients to practitioners said method
3   comprising:
4   certifying a group of practitioners to perform a medical procedure;
5   identifying individual patients who wish to receive the procedure; and
6   providing to the identified individual patients a list of certified practitioners,
7   wherein those practitioners who have performed more procedures than others of the
8   practitioners are placed preferentially on the list.

1   2.   A method as in claim 1, wherein certifying the practitioners comprises
2   training practitioners.

1   3.   A method as in claim 1 or 2, wherein certifying the practitioners
2   comprises testing the practitioners.

1   4.   A method as in claim 1 or 2, wherein certifying comprises requiring
2   that the practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1   5.   A method as in claim 1, further comprising removing practitioners
2   from the certified group.

1   6.   A method as in claim 1, wherein the practitioners are placed into tiers
2   based on the number of procedures performed and wherein practitioners from higher tiers are
3   preferentially placed on lists.

1   7.   A method as in claim 6, wherein the individual practitioners are
2   randomly ordered within a tier.

1   8.   A method as in claim 6 or 7, wherein each tier is defined by a threshold
2   number of procedures performed over a selected period of time.

1   9.   A method as in claims 6 or 7, wherein each tier is defined by the
2   aggregate number of procedures performed.

1   10.   A method as in claim 6, wherein the practitioners are assigned to at
2   least three tiers.

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1   11.   A method as in claim 10, wherein the practitioners are assigned to an

2 initial tier when they become certified, to an intermediate tier when they treat a first threshold

3 number of patients over a preselected time period, and to a higher tier when they treat a

4 second threshold number of patients over the preselected time period.

1   12.   A method as in claim 1, wherein identifying individual patients

2 comprises collecting names and contact information from individual patients.

1   13.   A method as in claim 12, wherein at least some of the individual

2 patients contact the coordinator in response to solicitations.

1   14.   A method for referring patients to dental practitioners, said method

2 comprising:

3   certifying dental practitioners to perform a dental procedure;

4   informing a potential patient population of the availability of the procedure;

5   identifying individual patients who wish to receive the procedure;

6   providing to the identified individual patients referral lists of certified

7 practitioners wherein individual practitioners are preferentially placed on the referral lists

8 based on one or more performance criteria.

1   15.   A method as in claim 14, wherein the performance criteria include the

2 number of dental procedures performed over a preselected time period.

1   16.   A method as in claim 14 or 15, wherein the performance criteria

2 include data relating to successful patient outcomes.

1   17.   A method as in claim 14, wherein informing comprises soliciting

2 patients.

1   18.   A method as in claim 17, wherein soliciting comprises advertising in

2 print and/or electronic media.

1   19.   A method as in claim 14, wherein certifying the dental practitioners

2 comprises training the dental practitioners.

1   20.   A method as in claim 14 or 19, wherein certifying the dental

2 practitioners comprises testing the dental practitioners.

1   21.   A method as in claim 14 or 19, wherein certifying comprises requiring
2   that the dental practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1   22.   A method as in claim 14, further comprising removing dental
2   practitioners from the certified group.

1   23.   A method as in claim 15, wherein the dental practitioners are placed
2   into tiers based on the number of procedures performed and wherein the tiers are arranged in
3   order on the list.

1   24.   A method as in claim 23, wherein the individual dental practitioners
2   are randomly ordered within a tier.

1   25.   A method as in claim 23, wherein the dental practitioners are assigned
2   to at least three tiers.

1   26.   A method as in claim 23 to 25, wherein each tier is defined by a
2   threshold number of procedures performed over a selected period of time.

1   27.   A method as in claim 23 to 25, wherein each tier is defined by an
2   aggregate number of procedures performed.

1   28.   A method as in claim 25, wherein the dental practitioners are assigned
2   to an initial tier when they become certified, to an intermediate tier when they treat a first
3   threshold number of patients over a preselected time period, and to a higher tier when they
4   treat a second threshold number of patients over the preselected time period.

1   29.   A method as in claim 14, wherein identifying individual patients
2   comprises collecting names and contact information from individual patients who contact a
3   coordinator.

1   30.   A method as in claim 29, wherein at least some of the individual
2   patients contact a referral center who produces the referral list in response to solicitations
3   from the coordinator.

1   31.   A method for referring patients to practitioners to perform a procedure
2   said method comprising:

3 maintaining a referral directory which includes contact information for
4 practitioners, wherein the practitioners are certified to perform the procedure and are
5 prioritized in a plurality of tiers depending on the number of procedures that they have
6 performed;
7 soliciting and receiving inquiries from prospective patients regarding the
8 procedure; and
9 referring to individual patients at their requests practitioners within the
10 patient's geographic area, wherein practitioners are selected from the referral directory in a
11 manner which preferentially presents practitioners from tiers which require a higher number
12 of procedures relative to practitioners from tiers which require a lower threshold number of
13 procedures.

1 32. A method as in claim 31, wherein maintaining the referral directory
2 comprises:
3 certifying practitioners to perform the procedure; and
4 tracking the number of times each certified practitioner performs the
5 procedure to produce a performance number for each practitioner;
6 periodically updating the referral directory to reflect updated performance
7 numbers.

1 33. A method as in claim 32, wherein the performance number comprises
2 the aggregate number of procedures performed by an individual practitioner.

1 34. A method as in claim 32, wherein the performance number comprises
2 the number of procedures performed by an individual practitioner over a predetermined time
3 interval.

1 35. A method as in claim 31, wherein the plurality of tiers is at least three.

1 36. A method as in claim 31, wherein soliciting comprises advertising and
2 providing contact information that permits a patient to contact a referral center.

1 37. A method as in claim 36, wherein the referral is a person.

1 38. A method as in claim 36, wherein the coordinator is an automated
2 response system.

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1   39.   A method as in claim 31, wherein referring comprises:

2   determining the location of the patient's geographic area; and

3   generating from the referral directors a referral list of practitioners within the

4 patient's geographic area, wherein the list includes a number of practitioners selected and/or

5 arranged so that practitioners from higher tiers are preferentially referred.

1   40.   A method as in claim 39, wherein the higher tiered practitioners are

2 placed on lists in any geographic area more often than lower tiered practitioners.

1   41.   A method as in claim 39, wherein the higher tiered practitioners are

2 placed earlier on a single list than the lower tiered practitioners.

1   42.   A method as in claim 31 wherein referring comprises:

2   determining the location of the patient's geographic area; and

3   selecting a single practitioner to be referred to the patient, wherein

4 practitioners from higher tiers are selected more often than those from lower tiers.

1   43.   A method as in claims 39 or 42, wherein all practitioners are included

2 on at least some referral lists.

1   44.   A method as in claim 31, wherein the referral directory comprises an

2 electronic database, wherein soliciting comprises receiving voice or data inquiries from

3 potential patients at a central location, and wherein referring comprises generating a referral

4 list from the electronic database and responding to the inquiry by providing the referral list to

5 the patient.

1   45.   A method as in claim 44, wherein generating the referral list comprises

2 presenting an ordered list of practitioners on a display screen and responding comprises

3 reading at least some of the names of the practitioners to the potential patients.

1   46.   A method for maintaining a referral directory, said method comprising:

2   certifying practitioners to perform a medical procedure;

3   tracking the number of times each certified practitioner performs the

4 procedure; and

5   maintaining a patient referral directory, wherein the practitioners are

6 prioritized on the list based on the number of times each has performed the procedure.

1   47.   A method as in claim 46, wherein certifying the practitioners

2   comprises training practitioners.

1   48.   A method as in claim 46 or 47, wherein certifying the practitioners

2   comprises testing the practitioners.

1   49.   A method as in claim 46 or 47, wherein certifying comprises requiring

2   that the practitioners have performed at least one procedure.

1   50.   A method as in claim 46, further comprising removing practitioners

2   from the certified group.

1   51.   A method as in claim 46, wherein tracking comprises determining the

2   number of times a practitioner acquires a kit to perform the procedure on a patient.

1   52.   A method as in claim 46, further comprising dividing the directory

2   based on geographic location.

1   53.   A method as in claim 52, wherein the list is divided into at least two

2   tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first threshold number of procedures

3   being in a higher tier.

1   54.   A method as in claim 53, wherein the list is divided into at least three

2   tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first threshold number of procedures

3   being in a higher tier, those who have performed more than a second threshold number but

4   less than the first being in a lower tier, and those who have performed less than the second

5   threshold number being in a still lower tier.

1   55.   A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the number of

2   times the procedure is performed is measured periodically over a fixed time interval and the

3   directory periodically updated.

1   56.   A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the

2   practitioners are not ordered within a tier.

1   57.   A method as in any of claims 47, and 50 to 54, wherein the

2 practitioners are further ranked within each tier based on the number of procedures

3 performed.

1   58.   A method as in claim 46, wherein the directory is maintained in an

2 electronic database.

1   59.   A method as in claim 58, further comprising generating a referral list

2 for an individual patient from the patient referral directory, wherein the listed is generated

3 automatically from the electronic database based on the patient's geographic location and

4 wherein practitioners with a higher priority have an increased likelihood of appearing on any

5 referral list.

1   60.   A computer system for generating a list of medical practitioners for

2 referring to potential patients, said system comprising:

3   means for maintaining a referral directory which includes contact information

4 for practitioners who are certified to perform a procedure, wherein the practitioners are

5 prioritized in a plurality of tiers depending on the number of procedures that they have

6 performed; and

7   means for sorting practitioners on the referral directory to produce a referral

8 list in response to an inquiry from a prospective patient in a particular geographic location

9 wherein practitioners are first sorted based on proximity to the geographic location and then

10 preferentially selected based on the tier to which the practitioner has been assigned.

1   61.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the means for maintaining

2 comprises an electronic database that is updateable to add and remove practitioners and to

3 change the tier status of individual practitioners.

1   62.   A computer system as in claim 60 or 61, wherein the electronic

2 database includes at least three tiers with practitioners who have performed more than a first

3 threshold number of procedures being in a higher tier, those who have performed more than a

4 second threshold number but less than the first threshold number being in a lower tier, and

5 those who have performed less than the second threshold number being in a still lower tier.

1   63.   A computer system as in claim 62, wherein the number of times the

2 procedure is performed is measured over a fixed time interval.

1   64.   A computer system as in claim 62, wherein the number of times the

2 procedure is performed is cumulative.

1   65.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the practitioners are not

2 ordered within a tier.

1   66.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the practitioners are further

2 ranked within each tier based on the number of procedures performed.

1   67.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein the means for sorting will

2 select a plurality of practitioners for each referral list with at least practitioners from the

3 highest tier being selected most often, those from the lower tier being selected less often, and

4 those from the still lower tier being selected still less often.

1   68.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein only a single practitioner is

2 selected for each referral list, with at least practitioners from the highest tier being selected

3 most often, those from the lower tier being selected less often, and those from the still lower

4 tier being selected still less often.

1   69.   A computer system as in claim 60, wherein all practitioners are

2 selected at least some of the time.

1   70.   A computer system as in claim 60, further comprising means for

2 inputting data into the maintaining means and means for displaying the referral lists.

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